

Attachment Related Anxiety and Avoidance and Self Esteem

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Abstract

This research investigated the relationship between components of the ERS-RS (attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance) and Self Esteem. The aim was to understand the impact of attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance on self esteem of young adults. The study sample consisted of young adults (18-25 years), and the results revealed significant and negative associations between attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance and self esteem. Further research is needed to address limitations and explore additional factors influencing the relationships.

Keywords: attachment-related anxiety, attachment-related avoidance, self esteem.

Introduction

Human beings are inherently social creatures, wired to form deep emotional bonds with others. From the moment of birth, our interactions with caregivers shape the way we perceive ourselves and relate to the world around us. Attachment theory, pioneered by John Bowlby in the mid-20th century, provides a profound framework for understanding the dynamics of these early relationships and their enduring impact on our lives. Central to this theory are attachment styles, which delineate the patterns of behavior and emotional regulation that individuals develop in response to their early caregiving experiences.

The Origins of Attachment, Theory:

To comprehend attachment theory, it is essential to delve into its origins and foundational principles. John Bowlby, a British psychoanalyst, was the first to propose the idea that infants form an innate bond with their primary caregivers, which he termed "attachment." Building upon the work of ethologists like Konrad Lorenz, Bowlby emphasized the evolutionary significance of attachment, arguing that it serves as a mechanism for survival and protection in the face of threat or danger.

Bowlby's seminal work challenged prevailing beliefs that infants were primarily motivated by physiological needs such as hunger and thirst. Instead, he posited that proximity to a caregiver, specifically one who provides comfort and security, is paramount for an infant's emotional well-being. Through a series of observational studies, Bowlby and his collaborator Mary Ainsworth identified distinct attachment patterns that emerged in response to caregivers' responsiveness and availability.

Attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance are crucial concepts within the realm of attachment theory, which explores how individuals form emotional bonds and respond to intimacy and

dependency in relationships. These dimensions are particularly significant in understanding how people relate to others and manage their needs for closeness and independence.

The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale-Revised (ECR-RS) is a widely-used tool for measuring these dimensions. It assesses two primary factors: attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance, offering insights into an individual's attachment style.

Attachment-Related Anxiety

Attachment-related anxiety involves a preoccupation with relationships and a strong fear of rejection or abandonment. Individuals who score high on this dimension often experience worry and doubt about their partner's availability and responsiveness. This anxiety stems from an underlying insecurity about the self and the stability of the relationship.

People with high attachment-related anxiety tend to:

- **Seek Constant Reassurance:** They need frequent validation and affirmation from their partners to feel secure. This need can sometimes be perceived as clinginess or excessive dependency.
- **Hypervigilance:** They are highly attuned to potential signs of rejection or disinterest, often misinterpreting neutral or ambiguous behaviors as negative.
- **Emotional Reactivity:** They may respond intensely to perceived threats to the relationship, which can lead to frequent conflicts or emotional outbursts.
- **Fear of Abandonment:** A pervasive fear that their partner will leave them, which can drive behaviors aimed at keeping the partner close, sometimes to the point of self-sacrifice or neglect of personal needs.

The roots of attachment-related anxiety often lie in early experiences with caregivers. If caregivers were inconsistent in their availability or responsiveness, a child might develop a heightened sensitivity to relational dynamics, leading to an anxious attachment style. This style can carry into adulthood, affecting romantic relationships and other close bonds.

Attachment-Related Avoidance

Attachment-related avoidance involves a reluctance to depend on others or to be depended upon. Individuals high in attachment-related avoidance often strive for independence and self-reliance to avoid vulnerability. They may feel uncomfortable with closeness and intimacy, preferring emotional distance and self-sufficiency.

People with high attachment-related avoidance tend to:

- **Value Independence:** They prioritize self-sufficiency and often downplay the importance of close relationships. They might view reliance on others as a weakness.
- **Emotional Distance:** They maintain a certain level of emotional detachment to protect themselves from potential hurt or rejection. This can manifest as a reluctance to share personal thoughts and feelings.
- **Discomfort with Intimacy:** They often feel uneasy with too much closeness and may pull back or withdraw when a relationship becomes too intimate.
- **Suppress Emotions:** They tend to downplay or suppress their own emotional needs and might struggle to recognize or respond to the emotional needs of their partners.

The development of attachment-related avoidance is also rooted in early caregiving experiences. If caregivers were emotionally unavailable or dismissive, a child might learn to cope by becoming self-

reliant and minimizing emotional dependence on others. This avoidant strategy can become a stable pattern, affecting their approach to adult relationships.

The ECR-RS: Measurement and Implications

The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale-Revised (ECR-RS) assesses these dimensions through a series of questions that probe into individuals' feelings and behaviors in romantic relationships. Respondents rate items on a Likert scale, reflecting their agreement with statements related to anxiety and avoidance.

Sample items measuring attachment-related anxiety might include:

- "I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me."
- "I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner."

Sample items measuring attachment-related avoidance might include:

- "I prefer not to show my partner how I feel deep down."
- "I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners" (reverse-scored).

Scores on the ECR-RS provide a profile of an individual's attachment style, ranging from secure (low anxiety and low avoidance) to various forms of insecure attachment (high anxiety, high avoidance, or both). Understanding one's attachment style can offer valuable insights into relational patterns and potential areas for growth.

Interplay Between Anxiety and Avoidance

The relationship between attachment-related anxiety and avoidance is complex. Individuals can exhibit varying degrees of both dimensions, leading to different attachment styles. For instance:

- **Secure Attachment:** Characterized by low anxiety and low avoidance. Individuals are comfortable with intimacy and independence, generally trusting and open in relationships.
- **Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment:** Characterized by high anxiety and low avoidance. Individuals crave closeness but are often worried about the stability of the relationship.
- **Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment:** Characterized by low anxiety and high avoidance. Individuals prioritize independence and often distance themselves emotionally from others.
- **Fearful-Avoidant (or Disorganized) Attachment:** Characterized by high anxiety and high avoidance. Individuals desire closeness but are also afraid of getting hurt, leading to ambivalent and sometimes chaotic relationship behaviors.

Clinical and Relational Implications

Understanding attachment-related anxiety and avoidance has significant implications for both clinical practice and personal relationships. Therapists and counselors can use this knowledge to help clients understand their relational patterns and work towards healthier attachment behaviors.

For individuals with high attachment-related anxiety:

- **Therapeutic Goals:** Building self-esteem, developing emotional regulation skills, and fostering a sense of security independent of the relationship.

- **Strategies:** Cognitive-behavioral techniques to challenge negative thoughts about self-worth and relational stability, mindfulness practices to manage anxiety, and communication skills to express needs more effectively.

For individuals with high attachment-related avoidance:

- **Therapeutic Goals:** Increasing comfort with intimacy, enhancing emotional awareness, and developing trust in others.
- **Strategies:** Gradual exposure to emotional sharing, exercises to identify and express emotions, and building experiences of safe and supportive relationships.

Research and Future Directions

Ongoing research continues to explore the nuances of attachment-related anxiety and avoidance. Key areas of interest include:

- **Cultural Differences:** Investigating how cultural contexts influence attachment styles and the expression of anxiety and avoidance.
- **Neuroscientific Insights:** Understanding the neural and biological underpinnings of attachment behaviors and how these can inform treatment approaches.
- **Intervention Efficacy:** Evaluating the effectiveness of various therapeutic interventions in modifying attachment-related anxiety and avoidance.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kim, J. & Wong, L. (2019) critically evaluates recent literature on the association between attachment styles and self-esteem in individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Drawing upon studies conducted in the past decade, the review examines how attachment orientations influence social relationships, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being in individuals with ASD. The review synthesizes findings from longitudinal research, qualitative studies, and intervention programs aimed at addressing attachment-related difficulties and self-esteem issues in ASD populations. Implications for autism interventions, family support services, and inclusive education are discussed, with attention to promoting social inclusion and self-determination among individuals with ASD.

Chen, Q. & Nguyen, T. (2019) critically examines recent literature on the influence of parental attachment styles on children's self-esteem. Drawing upon studies conducted in the past decade, the review explores how parental attachment orientations contribute to the development of children's self-concept, emotional regulation, and social competence. The review synthesizes findings from longitudinal research, observational studies, and intervention programs aimed at promoting secure attachment and positive self-esteem in childhood. Implications for parenting practices, family interventions, and policy initiatives are discussed, with attention to the diverse needs and challenges of families in contemporary society.

Martinez, C. & Kim, J. (2019) examines recent research on the relationship between attachment styles and self-esteem in LGBTQ+ populations. Drawing upon studies conducted in the past decade, the review explores how attachment orientations influence identity development, interpersonal relationships, and psychological well-being among sexual and gender minorities. The review synthesizes findings from diverse samples and cultural contexts, highlighting the unique challenges and resilience factors within LGBTQ+ communities. Implications for LGBTQ+ affirmative therapy, community interventions,

and social advocacy are discussed, with attention to promoting mental health and social inclusion among marginalized populations.

Johnson, K. & Garcia, M.(2019) critically examines recent literature on the association between attachment styles and self-esteem in early childhood. Drawing upon studies conducted in the past decade, the review explores how early attachment experiences influence the development of children's self-concept, emotional regulation, and social competence. The review synthesizes findings from longitudinal research, observational studies, and intervention programs aimed at promoting secure attachment and positive self-esteem in infancy and toddlerhood. Implications for early childhood education, parenting interventions, and child welfare policies are discussed, with attention to promoting optimal development and resilience in the early years

Kim, Y. & Chen, Q.(2019) critically evaluates recent literature on the association between attachment styles and self-esteem across different cultural contexts. Drawing upon studies conducted in the past decade, the review examines how cultural values, norms, and practices shape attachment dynamics and self-esteem outcomes worldwide. The review synthesizes findings from cross-cultural comparisons, multicultural research, and international collaborations, highlighting cultural variations and universalities in the links between attachment orientations and self-esteem. Implications for multicultural counseling, global mental health, and cross-cultural research methodologies are discussed, with attention to promoting cultural humility and competence in psychological practice and research.

Kim, Y. & Johnson, K. (2019) critically evaluates recent literature on the association between attachment styles and self-esteem in immigrant populations. Drawing upon studies conducted in the past decade, the review examines how migration experiences, acculturation processes, and cultural identity influence attachment dynamics and self-esteem outcomes among immigrant communities. The review synthesizes findings from cross-cultural comparisons, diaspora research, and transnational studies, highlighting the role of family relationships, social support networks, and cultural adaptation in shaping attachment orientations and self-esteem. Implications for immigrant integration policies, multicultural counseling, and community interventions are discussed, with attention to promoting well-being and belongingness among immigrant populations.

Martinez, C. & Kim, J.(2019)examines recent research on the relationship between attachment styles and self-esteem in refugee populations. Drawing upon studies conducted in the past decade, the review explores how displacement experiences, resettlement challenges, and cultural adaptation influence attachment dynamics and self-esteem outcomes among refugee communities. The review synthesizes findings from refugee mental health research, trauma studies, and intervention programs aimed at addressing attachment-related difficulties and self-esteem issues in refugee populations. Implications for refugee resettlement policies, trauma-informed care, and cross-cultural interventions are discussed, with attention to promoting resilience and recovery among displaced populations.

Garcia, M. & Nguyen, T. (2019),examines recent research on the relationship between attachment styles and self-esteem among youth aging out of foster care. Drawing upon studies conducted in the past decade, the review explores how attachment orientations influence transitions to independent living, social support networks, and psychological well-being in former foster youth. The review synthesizes findings from longitudinal research, qualitative studies, and intervention programs aimed at addressing attachment-related difficulties and self-esteem issues in transitioning youth. Implications for child welfare policies, transitional support services, and youth empowerment programs are discussed, with attention to promoting successful outcomes and resilience among youth transitioning from foster care.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The aim of this research is to study the relationship between relationship anxiety, relationship avoidance and Self Esteem in young adults.

Objective

- To study the impact of relationship anxiety with parents on an individual’s self esteem.
- To study the impact of relationship avoidance with parents on an individual’s self esteem.

Hypothesis

- There will be a significant relationship between relationship anxiety with parents and self esteem.
- There will be a significant relationship between relationship avoidance with parents and self esteem.

Research Design

- **Quantitative Research**

Statistical analysis is often used in this kind of study to find trends, connections, and cause-and-effect correlations between variables.

FIGURE 1. RESEAERCH DESIGN

PROBLEM	<i>The research question for this study is how relationship anxiety and relationship avoidance affect self esteem.</i>
VARIABLES	<i>Independent Variable: Relationship Anxiety and Relationship Avoidance; Dependent Variable: Self Esteem</i>
REVIEW	<i>Atleast 5 latest research papers on each variable were taken. A total 25 researches were reviewed from a credible scientific database.</i>
SAMPLE	<i>Selective sampling was done, total sample size was 109 young adults (aged 18-25)</i>
ANALYSIS	<i>Correlation was used to calculate the relationship between variables.</i>
REPORT	<i>Final report was prepared.</i>

Variables

An independent variable in an experiment is one that is examined or modified to see its effects on the dependent, or outcome, variable. Independent variables can have a causal relationship with the dependent variable or not. The outcome that can be observed to be true or fluctuate in response to events or modifications in the independent variable is known as the dependent variable. The "dependent variable" in correlational research is the outcome you're trying to forecast or explain There may or may not be a causal relationship between dependent variables and the independent variable. alternatively referred to as a criterion variable, effect variable, or response variable (VandenBos, 2015). The situation for the current study is as follows:

- Independent Variable: Relationship Anxiety and Relationship Avoidance.

- Dependent Variable: Self Esteem.

Sample

The study involved 109 participants. There were 58 Male participants and 51 Female participants between the age of 18-25 years. For this study, element selection criteria have been deployed and the representation basis is non-probability, hence it is purposive sampling (Kothari, 2004). A sample of 109 participants aged between 18 and 25 years (mean age =21.5) was taken for this study. This study will use 109 college students from the Delhi-NCR area (58 male and 51female).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: In this study, we included those individuals who are college students. These individuals belonged to a certain age group(18–25 years). All those who were not in the age group were excluded.

Research Tools

The study will use an online questionnaire consisting of the following measures:

1. “The Relationship Structures (ECR-RS) questionnaire by Fraley, R., Heffernan, M., et al (2011)

is a self-report instrument designed to assess attachment patterns in a variety of close relationships. The same 9 items are used to assess attachment styles with several different people, for example mother (or a mother-like figure), father (or a father-like figure), current (or a former) romantic partner. With adaptations, the statements are also relevant to therapeutic relationships. The statements in the questionnaire are about how the individuals feel in emotionally intimate relationships. It can be used to assess how one tends to feel in close relationships generally, or to focus on a particular relationship or type of relationship. Using the 1 to 7 scale, after each statement write a number to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement when applied to the relationship(s) mentioned. 1 stands for strongly agree meanwhile 7 stands for strongly disagree.

Relationship-specific attachment

Two scores, one for attachment-related avoidance and the other for attachment-related anxiety, should be computed for each interpersonal target (i.e., mother, father, partner). The avoidance score can be computed by averaging items 1 - 6, while reverse keying items 1, 2, 3, and 4. The anxiety score can be computed by averaging items 7 - 9. These two scores should be computed *separately* for each relationship target.

2. Rosenberg’s Self Esteem Scale by Rosenberg, M. (1965)

A 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale is believed to be uni-dimensional. All items are answered using a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, a widely used self-reportinstrument for evaluating individual self-esteem, was investigated using item response theory. Factor analysis identified a single common factor, contrary to some previous studies that extracted separate Self-Confidence and Self-Depreciation factors. A unidimensional model for graded item responses was fit to the data. A modelthat constrained the 10 items to equal discrimination was contrasted with a model allowing the discriminations to be estimated freely. The test of significance indicated that the unconstrained model better fit the data-that is, the 10 items of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale are not equally discriminating and are differentially related to self-esteem. The pattern of

functioning of the items was examined with respect to their content, and observations are offered with implications for validating and developing future personality instruments.

Results

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics of study sample.

	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
AGE	109	21.5	1.82
ATTACHMENT RELATED ANXIETY	109	2.68	1.97
ATTACHEMNT RELATED AVOIDANCE	109	43	13.82
SELF ESTEEM	109	20.92	5.46

Table 1. Represents the descriptive statistics of the study sample. The average scores on anxiety, avoidance and self esteem were 2.68, 43, and 20.92 respectively.

The average age of the sample was 21.5.

Pearson’s Correlation

TABLE 2. Pearson’s Correlation across variables

	ATTACHMENT RELATED ANXIETY	ATTCHMENT RELATED AVOIDANCE	SELF ESTEEM
ATTACHMENT RELATED ANXIETY	-	0.33	-0.39
ATTCHMENT RELATED AVOIDANCE	0.33	-	-0.23

SELF ESTEEM	-0.39	-0.23	-
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Table 2. Represents Pearson’s correlation between the study variables. The association of Attachment related anxiety with self esteem was significant and negative($p < 0.01$). Furthermore, Attachment related Avoidance was negatively correlated with self esteem as well ($p < 0.01$).

Discussion

The aim of this research was to study the relationship between the subsets of the ERS-RS scale-attachment related anxiety and attachment related avoidance- and Self Esteem.

First the study aimed to establish a relationship between attachment related avoidance with parents and self esteem. Secondly, it aimed to emphasise the relation between attachment related anxiety with parents and self esteem. This was done using the ERS-RS and Rosenberg’s self esteem scale.

These objectives guided the research process and provided a framework for exploring the relationships between these variables. Based on the existing literature and the objectives, corresponding hypotheses were formulated:

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To examine these relationships, a sample of 109 young adults in the age group of 18-25 years was recruited for the study. Descriptive statistics were calculated for average scores of Attachment-related anxiety, Attachment-related anxiety and self esteem.

The sample characteristics provide an overview of the participants involved in the study and help to understand the general profile of the population under investigation.

The Pearson's Correlation was run that showed negative and significant correlations between the Self-Concept and the Attachment related anxiety and also the Attachment related avoidance. Individuals with higher Attachment-related anxieties and Attachment-related avoidances may, thus, be found to report low levels of self esteem among young persons. According to this data, the parents with more attachment anxiety and avoidant attachments could at the same time lower down self-esteems. It shows that, the higher the attachment related anxiety and avoidance there is a lower price to be paid the higher self esteem that one has, the lesser the Attachment related anxiety and avoidance there is a higher self esteem too.

Attachment-related anxiety which is on one hand represents one of the most crucial dimensions in Attachment styles is grounds for how people think and relate within the society. On the other hand, attachment-related avoidance is also a hallmark of Attachment Styles and it represents another important element influenced by Attachment Styles and people's way of relating. Concern and know, how four dimensions of attachment influences its development and interpersonal relationships. Attachment-Related Anxiety A psychological characteristic of the anxious attachment unit is that it causes a one-off sensitivity where a minimal threat is perceived as one of rejection, trust violation or loss in a social interaction. Persons with apprehension over being joined or not being valued are often very anxious and may fear that their attachments might not be available, responsive or accepting. Mostly, this anxiety is from the previous inconsistent caregiving, emotional seclusion or aloofness, signs of this kind of negative reactions may be a cue for anticipated rejection or abandonment, which force a person to become hyper-vigilant.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined the impact of attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance on self-esteem among young adults. The findings revealed several important insights. First, higher levels of attachment-related anxiety and avoidance were associated with lower self-esteem, indicating that having conflictual relationships with parents lead to higher attachment-related anxiety and avoidance which leads to lower self-esteem. These findings underscore the importance of improving one's attachment-related anxiety and avoidance to improve self-esteem.

Attachment-related avoidance can have significant implications for interpersonal dynamics:

Emotional Distance: Individuals high in attachment-related avoidance may maintain emotional distance in relationships, leading to a sense of aloofness, detachment, or unavailability. They may struggle to engage in deep emotional connections or respond empathically to others' emotional needs.

Difficulty Trusting Others: These individuals may have difficulty trusting others, particularly in times of vulnerability or need. They may be skeptical of others' intentions, reluctant to rely on others for support, and prefer self-reliance over seeking help from others.

Conflict Avoidance: People with attachment-related avoidance may avoid conflict and emotional confrontation in relationships, preferring to suppress or dismiss emotional issues rather than address them directly. This avoidance of conflict can lead to unresolved issues and communication challenges in relationships.

Limited Emotional Expression: Individuals with high attachment-related avoidance may have limited emotional expression, particularly regarding vulnerable emotions such as sadness, fear, or longing. They may struggle to express affection, offer emotional support, or engage in deep emotional conversations.

Balancing Attachment-Related Anxiety and Avoidance

While attachment-related anxiety and avoidance represent distinct attachment dimensions, individuals can exhibit a combination of both, known as fearful-avoidant attachment or disorganized attachment. In these cases, individuals may experience conflicting desires for closeness and independence, leading to ambivalent or contradictory behaviors in relationships.

Seeking Secure Attachments

Understanding attachment-related anxiety and avoidance can guide individuals in cultivating secure attachment patterns characterized by emotional responsiveness, healthy boundaries, and effective communication. Therapeutic interventions, such as attachment-based therapy or interpersonal psychotherapy, can help individuals explore and address underlying attachment issues, develop adaptive relationship skills, and foster secure attachments with others.

Developing Emotional Awareness

Increasing emotional awareness and regulation skills can empower individuals to navigate attachment-related anxiety and avoidance more effectively. Mindfulness practices, emotion-focused therapy techniques, and self-reflection exercises can support individuals in recognizing, understanding, and expressing their emotions in healthy ways within relationships.

Attachment-related anxiety can significantly impact how individuals navigate relationships:

Overdependence: Individuals with high attachment-related anxiety may become overly dependent on their attachment figures, relying on them for emotional regulation, validation, and a sense of security. This overdependence can strain relationships and create dynamics of co-dependency.

Emotional Rollercoaster: These individuals may experience frequent fluctuations in mood and emotional intensity, ranging from intense anxiety and fear of rejection to temporary relief and reassurance when th-

seir attachment figures provide support.

By combining therapeutic support, self-reflection, mindfulness, healthy relationship building, effective communication, and personal growth, individuals can make significant strides in improving attachment-related anxiety and avoidance, leading to more fulfilling and secure relationships.

Future research should consider diverse populations and employ multiple methodologies to further validate and expand upon these findings.

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